

A Survey of Social Services for the Roma

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ROMANIA

Romania is a post-communist Eastern European Country. Romania joined NATO in 2004 and was inducted as part of the European Union in 2007. In the past years, Romania has experienced significant economic growth and the standard of living has greatly increased.

Out of a population of 19.69 million in Romania (2013, World Factbook), about 700,000 are Roma (about 3.3% of the population) though the actual number may be closer to 2 million due to fear that identification may lead to stigmatization. The Roma number around 2.73 million in Europe.



ABOUT THE ROMA

According to the World Bank, the Roma are one of the largest and most vulnerable minority groups in Europe. This group is also historically known as or referred to as “gypsies,” “travelers,” “Rom,” or “Tsigani” and are believed to have originally come from India.

- In Eastern Europe, 71% of Roma live in poverty.
- About 29% of Roma do not complete secondary education.
- About 50% of Roma men and 75% of Roma women are unemployed.
- The majority of Roma are no longer nomadic, but may seasonally migrate for jobs.

PROJECT INFORMATION

The goal of this special studies was to understand the social services being provided to this population; the historical, social and cultural considerations that influence service provision/delivery; and the policies/research that inform what and how service is provided. Interviews and site visits were conducted with 7 organizations and individuals.



COMMUNITY CONTACTS

The following organizations/individuals were interviewed for this project:

- Gina Anton, President of Roma political party, running for county district position
- Sebastian Ghica, Director of IOSEF Foundation, works with vulnerable children
- Claudia and Adrian, Save the Children, Iasi
- Marian Mendache, Director of RomaniCRISS, an NGO that works on anti-discrimination in politics, education, health, and housing. Also, a leader in producing Roma-related research and publications.
- Margareta Hertanu, former Director of Minority Affairs, current Director of a Roma NGO focused on providing support to the local Roma community.
- Father Stefan, priest doing work with Roma prisoners in Italy
- A Roma health mediator in Bucharest

OUTCOMES

In the course of 2 weeks I was able to speak to community leaders, service providers, and community organizers to gain a clearer understanding of the specific needs of this group and how they are assessed, the types of service delivery models and the theories behind them, and the barriers and challenges of working with the Roma.

The completed work for this project included: a literature review, a summary of the interviews, 5 reflections, and an executive summary.

SKILLS UTILIZED/DEVELOPED

From this experience, I was able to practice:

- Tact in handling misconceptions of my purpose
- Critical and analytical skills in comparing social work in Romania, as well as globally and locally
- Revisiting and re-contextualizing my personal and professional identity in global social work practice

LESSONS LEARNED

- Take every lead offered to you, it opens doors.
- Don't be afraid to be assertive or ask questions.
- Remember to take a step back every so often to reassess where you are going and where you're at.



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CONNECTIONS

Classroom:

SW555: *Independent Study on Human Rights* - Understanding how a Human Rights framework is used and applied in the context of Social Work.

SW648: *Issues in Global Social Work Practice* and **SW823:** *Comparative Cross-National Analyses of Social Service Systems* - Critical thinking around the contexts that define social issues and influence interventions.

Career:

As previously mentioned, this opportunity has given me the chance to me to re-contextualize my personal and professional identity in global social work practice and see how I can continue to do similar work locally while keeping global in mind.

ADVICE

- Be prepared to be asked to take a stance on controversial issues. Know how you would choose to respond or not respond.
- Do your research and be knowledgeable about the country, the language, the issues, the culture of the organization, the individual, etc.
- Having contacts and relationships before arriving, even one good contact, makes a huge difference.